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# The path from idealism to the CIA

By Carleton F. Scofield

In 1944, Marine Lt. Cord Meyer was severely wounded in the fighting in the Pacific. There his idealism was born. He resolved to do all in his power to make the future for which his companions died "an improvement upon the past."

But he soon faced reality. It began with disillusionment at San Francisco when he saw the new United Nations designed as a structure for a different time, for a world that had been changed by the existence of the bomb. It was brought home to him when he witnessed bitterly the communist infiltration of the American Veterans Committee in whose formation and planning he had actively participated. And it finally convinced him, now president of the United World Federalists, that there was not yet in the world a sufficient foundation of shared belief on which to build a world government. For the next 26 years idealism was laid aside, and Cord Meyer functioned as a member of the CIA's secretive bureaucracy.

The author's career with the CIA did not begin auspiciously. After two years with the agency, he was subjected to an investigation by the FBI on the flimsiest of evidence, and a suspension without pay until his employment was declared "clearly consistent with the national security." He vividly describes this experience and what it entailed.

In the early years at the CIA the author directed its covert operations, but as the agency came under fire for its clandestine activity, he was placed in charge of the London office. In both positions he had an excellent opportunity to observe the political world and the CIA reaction to it. Consequently, a major part of his book is devoted to defense of the agency, and to the threat to peace of Soviet intentions and methods of operation.

Meyer's defense of the CIA's covert activities is compelling if one accepts his original two premises: that the federal government is justified in subsidizing the activities of private organizations, such as the National Student Association; and that the federal government is justified in conducting covert anti-communist operations in defense of democracy in other nations.

In 1967, President Johnson answered the first question by putting a stop to all covert support of private organizations. In defense of the covert action of the CIA in Chile, which put the agency under considerable fire, Meyer relates in detail the story of Allende and Chilean politics. He believes only that the action was too little and too late, and that the rather disastrous outcome was the result of Nixon's emotional reaction.

His defense of the agency in the face of so much adverse criticism is strengthened by a seemingly thorough knowledge of political fact. Such covert operations of the CIA do remain highly controversial, and are now the subject of congressional study in the attempt to establish a charter for the intelligence community.

The latter half of *Facing Reality* is devoted to what Meyer sees as the challenge of the Soviet Union, exhibited in its military build-up, in its geopolitical offensive with Cuba in Angola and Ethiopia, in its methods of infiltration and control. Here again his knowledge of politics in the more remote parts of the world is impressive.

He describes in some detail the Soviet and American intelligence communities, with emphasis upon the role of the latter in protecting the United States against the former. He is optimistic about the ability to do so if the CIA is freed from some of the restrictions he believes have made intelligence collection cumbersome and difficult. He has hope for the new legal charter for the intelligence agency with which Congress is now struggling. Like most students of intelligence, he believes in "close congressional oversight, rather than a host of legal restrictions."

Much of the last chapter of the book is concerned with the dissident movement within the Soviet Union and its satellite states of Eastern Europe. He reveals considerable knowledge of this movement, and great espect for it. In this movement, and the increasing economic problems of Moscow, he sees hope for the future.

He ends where he began: "Once again the construction of a world legal order to replace the anarchy of competing nation-states would appear on the agenda of far-sighted and practical statesmen."

*Carleton F. Scofield, chancellor emeritus of UMKC, was formerly an officer in CSS.*

**BOOKS OF THE DAY**

FACING REALITY: From World Federalism to the CIA, by Cord Meyer (433 pages; Harper & Row; $15.95)